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Serial No. 10/593,423  
March 15, 2012

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

The following listing of claims supersedes all prior versions and listings of claims in this application:

1. (Previously Presented) A data network comprising:
  - a provider node, a receiver node, and a plurality of intermediate nodes,
    - the provider node being arranged to provide data to at least one of said intermediate nodes or to the receiver node,
    - said intermediate nodes being arranged to receive data and forward data to at least one other intermediate node or to the receiver node, and
    - the receiver node being arranged to receive data from at least one intermediate node or from the provider node;
  - wherein:
    - said data comprises at least a part which relates to a path characterization metric;
    - said provider node is arranged to assign an initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of data provided by it;
    - said intermediate nodes are arranged to update the condition of the path characterization metric in respect of data they forward;
    - said receiver node is arranged to make available for the provider node discrepancy information indicative of a measure of any discrepancy between the condition of the path

characterization metric in respect of data received by it and a predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric; and

    said provider node is arranged to assign a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data provided by it in the event that it receives discrepancy information from said receiver node, the initial condition assigned in respect of said subsequent data differing from the initial condition assigned in respect of previous data provided by said provider node by a difference dependent on said discrepancy information.

2. (Previously Presented) A data network according to claim 1, wherein the condition of the path characterization metric at a node is indicative of a measure of congestion expected to be experienced by data on a path downstream of that node.

3. (Previously Presented) A data network according to claim 1, wherein the condition assigned to the path characterization metric is a value, and the predetermined target condition is a value.

4. (Previously Presented) A data network according to claim 1, wherein in the event that said provider node assigns a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data provided by it, said different initial condition is

assigned to decrease a corresponding discrepancy in respect of said subsequent data received by said receiver node.

5. (Previously Presented) A data network according to claim 4, wherein said different initial condition is assigned to maximize a possibility that said corresponding discrepancy in respect of said subsequent data received by said receiver node will be zero.

6. (Previously Presented) A data network according to claim 1, wherein an intermediate node is arranged to update the condition of the path characterization metric in response to a path characteristic associated with that node.

7. (Original) A data network according to claim 6, wherein said path characteristic relates to a measure of congestion on a path associated with that node.

8. (Previously Presented) A data network according to claim 6 wherein said path characteristic relates to a measure of congestion on a path downstream of that node.

9. (Previously Presented) A method for assigning path characterization metrics to data in a data network comprising a provider node, a receiver node, and a plurality of intermediate nodes, the provider node being arranged to provide data to at least one of said intermediate nodes or to the receiver node, said data comprising at least a part which

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relates to a path characterization metric, said intermediate nodes being arranged to receive data and forward data to at least one other intermediate node or to the receiver node, and the receiver node being arranged to receive data from at least one intermediate node or from the provider node; the method comprising steps of:

    assigning an initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of data provided by the provider node;

    updating the condition of the path characterization metric in respect of data forwarded by said intermediate nodes;

    monitoring a final condition of the path characterization metric in respect of data received by the receiver node, and determining discrepancy information indicative of a measure of any discrepancy between said final condition and a predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric; and

    assigning a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data provided by the provider node in the event that said discrepancy information indicates such a discrepancy in respect of previous data provided by the provider node, the initial condition assigned in respect of said subsequent data differing from the initial condition assigned in respect of said previous data by a difference dependent on said discrepancy information.

10. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 9, wherein the condition assigned to the path characterization metric is a value, and the predetermined target condition is a value.

11. (Previously Presented) A feedback node for enabling an initial condition to be assigned to a path characterization metric in respect of data to be forwarded through a data network, said data network comprising a provider node, a receiver node and a plurality of intermediate nodes, said data comprising at least a part which relates to a path characterization metric; said provider node being arranged to assign an initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of data, and to provide said data to at least one of said intermediate nodes or to the receiver node; said intermediate nodes being arranged to receive data from said provider node or from one or more other intermediate nodes, to update a condition of the path characterization metric in respect of data received by them, and to forward data to at least one other intermediate node or to the receiver node; and said receiver node being arranged to receive data from at least one intermediate node or from the provider node, and to make available for the feedback node information relating to the path characterization metric in respect of data received by it, said feedback node comprising:

at least one message processor arranged to enable a different initial condition to be assigned to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data provided by the provider node in the event that said feedback node receives information indicative of a

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discrepancy between a predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric and the condition of the path characterization metric in respect of previous data received by said receiver node, the initial condition assigned in respect of said subsequent data differing from the initial condition assigned in respect of previous data provided by said provider node by a difference dependent on said discrepancy information.

12. (Previously Presented) A feedback node according to claim 11, wherein the condition assigned to the path characterization metric is a value, and the predetermined target condition is a value.

13. (Previously Presented) A feedback node according to claim 11, wherein in the event that a different initial condition is assigned to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data, said different initial condition is assigned to decrease a corresponding discrepancy in respect of said subsequent data received by said receiver node.

14. (Previously Presented) A feedback node according to claim 11, said feedback node also serving as said provider node in said network.

15. (Previously Presented) A feedback node according to claim 14, said feedback node being arranged to assign a different initial condition to the path characterization metric

in respect of subsequent data in the event that it receives, from said receiver node, a measure of a discrepancy between said predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric and the condition of the path characterization metric in respect of previous data received by said receiver node.

16. (Previously Presented) A feedback node according to claim 14, said feedback node being arranged to assign a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data in the event that it receives, from said receiver node, information indicative of the condition of the path characterization metric in respect of previous data received by said receiver node, and determines that there is a discrepancy between said condition of the path characterization metric and said predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric.

17. (Previously Presented) A feedback node according to claim 11, said feedback node also serving as said receiver node in said network.

18. (Previously Presented) A feedback node according to claim 17, said feedback node being arranged to make available for the provider node a measure of a discrepancy between said predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric and the condition of the path characterization metric in respect of previous data received by said

receiver node, whereby to enable said provider node to assign a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data.

19. (Previously Presented) A feedback node according to claim 17, said feedback node being arranged to make available for the provider node information indicative of the condition of the path characterization metric in respect of previous data received by said receiver node, whereby to enable said provider node to assign a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data in the event that said provider node determines that there is a discrepancy between said condition of the path characterization metric and said predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric.

20. (Previously Presented) A method of providing data in a data network comprising a provider node, a receiver node and a plurality of intermediate nodes, the provider node being arranged to provide data to at least one of said intermediate nodes or to the receiver node, said data comprising at least a part which relates to a path characterization metric; said intermediate nodes being arranged to receive data from said provider node or from one or more other intermediate nodes, to update a condition of the path characterization metric in respect of data received by them, and to forward data to at least one other intermediate node or to the receiver node; and said receiver node being arranged to receive data from at least one intermediate node or from the provider node, and to make available for the

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provider node information indicative of a discrepancy between an eventual condition of the path characterization metric in respect of data received by it and a predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric; the method comprising:

assigning an initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of data;

providing said data to at least one of said intermediate nodes;

receiving information relating to said eventual condition of the path characterization metric in respect of previously-provided data received by said receiver node; and

assigning a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data in the event of receipt of discrepancy information indicative of a measure of any discrepancy between said eventual condition of the path characterization metric and a predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric, the initial condition assigned in respect of said subsequent data differing from the initial condition assigned in respect of previous data provided by said provider node by a difference dependent on said discrepancy information.

21. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 20, wherein the condition assigned to the path characterization metric is a value, and the predetermined target condition is a value.

22. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 20, said receiver node being arranged to make available for the provider node a measure of a discrepancy between

said predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric and said eventual condition of the path characterization metric in respect of previous data received, whereby to enable said provider node to assign a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data.

23. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 20, said receiver node being arranged to make available for the provider node information indicative of the condition of said eventual path characterization metric in respect of previously received data, whereby to enable said provider node to assign a different initial condition to the path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data in the event that said provider node determines that there is a discrepancy between said condition of the path characterization metric and said predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric.

24. (Currently Amended) A method for providing path characterization information for nodes in a network, said network comprising a plurality of nodes including a provider node, a receiver node, and at least one intermediate node, the provider node being arranged to provide data to at least one intermediate node or to the receiver node, an intermediate node being arranged to receive data and to forward data to at least one other intermediate node or to the receiver node, and the receiver node being arranged to receive data from the provider node or from at least one intermediate node; the method comprising:

assigning an initial condition to a path characterization metric in respect of data provided by the event that said provider node ~~provides data~~, said path characterization metric being associated with said data;

updating the condition of the path characterization metric in the event that an intermediate node receives said data;

determining an eventual condition of the path characterization metric in the event that said receiver node receives said data; and

establishing discrepancy information indicative of a measure of any discrepancy which exists between the eventual condition of the path characterization metric and a predetermined target condition;

wherein, in the event that it is established that a discrepancy does exist between said eventual condition and said predetermined target condition, said method further comprises:

assigning a different initial condition to the a-further path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data provided by the event that said provider node ~~subsequently provides further data, said further path characterization metric being associated with said further data, the initial condition assigned to the path characterization metric in respect of said subsequent data differing from the initial condition assigned to the path characterization metric in respect of said previous data previously provided by said provider node by a difference dependent on said discrepancy information;~~

updating the condition of the said further path characterization metric in respect of said subsequent data in the event that an intermediate node receives said subsequent further data; and

making information indicative of the said updated condition of the path characterization metric in respect of said subsequent data available to said intermediate node.

25. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 24, wherein the condition assigned to the path characterization metric is a value, and the predetermined target condition is a value.

26. (Currently Amended) A method for providing path characterization information for nodes in a network, said network comprising a plurality of nodes including a provider node, a receiver node, and at least one intermediate node, the provider node being arranged to provide data to at least one intermediate node or to the receiver node, an intermediate node being arranged to receive data and to forward data to at least one other intermediate node or to the receiver node, and the receiver node being arranged to receive data from the provider node or from at least one intermediate node; the method comprising:

assigning an initial condition to a path characterization metric in respect of data provided by the event that said provider node provides data, said path characterization metric being associated with said data;

updating the condition of the path characterization metric in the event that an intermediate node receives said data;

determining an eventual condition of the path characterization metric in the event that said receiver node receives said data; and

establishing discrepancy information indicative of a measure of any discrepancy which exists between the eventual condition of the path characterization metric and a predetermined target condition;

wherein, in the event that it is established that a discrepancy does exist between said eventual condition and said predetermined target condition, said method further comprises:

assigning an initial condition to the a further path characterization metric in respect of subsequent data provided by the event that said provider node subsequently provides further data, said further path characterization metric being associated with said further data, the initial condition assigned in respect of said further data differing from the initial condition assigned in respect of previous data provided by said provider node by a difference dependent on said discrepancy information;

updating the condition of the said further path characterization metric in respect of said subsequent data in the event that an intermediate node receives said subsequent further data;

making information indicative of [[said]] the updated condition of the path characterization metric in respect of said subsequent data available to said intermediate node; and

making information relating to the discrepancy between the eventual condition of the a previous path characterization metric in respect of said data previously provided by said provider node and said predetermined target condition available to said intermediate node.

27. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 26, wherein the condition assigned to the path characterization metric is a value, and the predetermined target condition is a value.

28. (Currently Amended) A path characterization system for providing path characterization information in association with a data network, said data network comprising a plurality of nodes including a provider node, a receiver node, and at least one intermediate node, the provider node being arranged to provide data to at least one intermediate node or to the receiver node, an intermediate node being arranged to receive data and to forward data to at least one other intermediate node or to the receiver node, and the receiver node being arranged to receive data from the provider node or from at least one intermediate node; the path characterization system comprising:

a path characterization metric condition assigning means, associated with the provider node, arranged to assign an initial condition to a path characterization metric in respect of data provided by the event that said provider node provides data;

a path characterization metric updating means, associated with an intermediate node, arranged to update the condition of the path characterization metric in the event that said node receives data; and

a path characterization metric feedback means, associated with the receiver node, arranged to determine an eventual condition of the path characterization metric in the event that said receiver node receives said data, and to make available for the path characterization metric condition assigning means discrepancy information indicative of a measure of any discrepancy between the eventual condition of the path characterization metric and a predetermined target condition for the path characterization metric; wherein said path characterization metric condition assigning means is arranged to assign a different initial condition to [[a]] the path characterization metric in respect of associated with subsequent data provided by said provider node in the event that feedback is made available indicative of such a discrepancy between the eventual condition of the path characterization metric in respect of said data previously provided by said provider node and the predetermined target condition in relation to a previous path characterization metric, the initial condition assigned to the path characterization metric in respect of said subsequent data differing from the initial condition assigned to the path characterization metric in respect of previous data previously provided by said provider node by a difference dependent on said discrepancy information.

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29. (Previously Presented) A path characterization system according to claim 28, wherein the condition assigned to the path characterization metric is a value, and the predetermined target condition is a value.

30-31. (Cancelled)